

CLOSURE OF CANNON AIR FORCE BASE AN ENORMOUS MISTAKE
Floor Statement - Rep. Tom Udall (NM-03)
May 16, 2005

Madam Speaker, Friday the 13th unfortunately lived up to its ominous reputation when this administration and Secretary Donald Rumsfeld of the Department of Defense announced that they were closing Cannon Air Force Base in Eastern New Mexico. They announced that Cannon was closing and all 2,800 employees would be moved to other areas.

I can tell you one thing; our Congressional delegation, all the Democrats and all the Republicans, along with our Governor, Governor Richardson, are united to fight this, because we believe this is an ill-advised decision, an ill-considered decision and a wrongheaded move. I just want to talk today about a couple of the reasons why this is ill-considered.

First of all, there is the issue of encroachment. When you have an Air Force base, you do not want residential areas nor industrial areas nearby. Of the 56 Air Force bases in this country, this is one of the best in terms of the encroachment issue. The local communities have worked very closely and formed a committee to try to make sure that this Air Force base was not encroached upon. There has been a robust buffer around this base for years and years.

Secondly, there is the issue for our airmen and women of practicing and training in supersonic air space. We have initiated in New Mexico something called the New Mexico Training Initiative. It will be approved in October by the FAA and the Air Force. What that training initiative is going to do is make sure that as those pilots get off the ground, within a matter of minutes, they can train in supersonic air space. This is not true anywhere else in the country. For many, many pilots, they must fly 2 to 3 hours in order to get to a training area.

At Cannon Air Force Base, there are nearby bombing ranges, there is training, there is going to be this access to supersonic air space, which is enormously important, and they will be able to train immediately and not have to travel those long distances. That fact was not even considered by the Department of Defense because their cut-off date was December of 2004, so we are going to put that fact before the commission.

The third issue is what is called the military value and mission of this particular base. This is a top-notch base. It is an exceptional base. We have spent as a country \$53 million over the last 6 or 7 years improving the towers, improving the runways, improving and enhancing the fire-fighting capability on the base and increasing base housing so that the base is in the kind of shape to make sure that our airmen and women that train there are ready to go into battle.

To close, this is a bad decision. Our Congressional delegation and Governor are united. We are going to persuade that base closing commission that this was not the right decision for the country.